



FIRST FOCUS

MAKING CHILDREN & FAMILIES THE PRIORITY

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July 26, 2007

The Honorable John Dingell
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Pallone
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Pete Stark
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Rangel
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Dingell, Pallone, Rangel and Stark:

I am writing on behalf of First Focus, a bipartisan advocacy organization committed to making children and their families a priority in federal policy and budget decisions, to express our strong support for the Children's Health and Medicare Protection Act (CHAMP) (H.R. 3162), legislation to reauthorize the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). As an organization committed to ensuring that all of our nation's children have access to affordable health coverage, First Focus applauds your bill, which maintains the \$50 billion commitment that was part of the FY 2008 Congressional Budget Resolution, and ensures that an additional 5.1 million children will gain coverage through reauthorization. The evidence is clear that children with health coverage are healthier, do better in school, and have a better chance to grow and succeed in life. This bill is a critical step toward ensuring that all of our nation's children have access to the health care they need.

In particular, we applaud the provisions in your bill which:

- Offer incentive payments to states to encourage additional enrollment of eligible low-income children into Medicaid and SCHIP.
- Allows states to use Express Lane Eligibility (ELE) to expedite eligibility determinations into CHIP or Medicaid.
- Provides a guaranteed dental benefit for children.
- Makes changes to citizenship and identity documentation requirements by giving states the option to return to the to pre-July 1, 2006 documentation requirements for children.
- Gives states the option to cover pregnant women, children up to age 24, and legal immigrant children and legal immigrant pregnant women.

- Clarifies that school clinic services may be covered under CHIP.
- Establishes a pediatric health quality program to develop child-centered quality and program performance measures and establishes a new independent Children's Access, Payment and Equality Commission (CAPE) to monitor children's access to care and services and adequacy of provider payment under CHIP and Medicaid.

As this legislation moves forward, we urge you build on this strong foundation by improving the bill's Express Lane Eligibility (ELE) provision, which, as currently drafted, fails to include federal assistance to help states build the information technology infrastructure that would allow them to implement Express Lane strategies. In addition, the bill, as written, severely limits those agencies which are permitted to identify potentially eligible low-income children to only federal nutrition programs. We believe that for ELE to be effective a broader array of government agencies which already are identifying low-income families for other needs-based programs should be permitted to serve as ELE agencies – including the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), the Earned Income Tax Credit, low-income housing subsidy programs, child care programs, and others. We also are concerned that the provision which requires an applicant to provide affirmative consent for enrollment presents a new and serious barrier for those who could most benefit from ELE. We would be happy to work with you to strengthen the ELE provisions so that states have the capability to substantially improve the enrollment of children who remain eligible but unenrolled in SCHIP or Medicaid.

Your commitment to our nation's children is to be applauded. We are sincerely thankful for your leadership and the tireless efforts by your staff, Bridgett Taylor, Amy Hall, Yvette Fontenot, Andy Schneider, Karen Nelson, Robert Clark, Debbie Curtis, Deb Mizeur and Cybele Bjorklund. We welcome the opportunity to work with you in the coming weeks to achieve our common objective, improving the health of our nation's most precious resource, our children.

Sincerely,



Bruce Lesley
President